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ABSTRACT

State legislative policies for educational restructuring are examined in this handbook, with a focus on restructuring from the perspective of state elected officials. Following an executive summary and introduction, the second and third parts explain the need for restructuring and features of the restructuring movement. Problems and obstacles are highlighted next, followed by a description of charter schools. Other reform efforts implemented in Dade County, Florida; Chicago, Illinois; Minnesota; and Kentucky are described. (28 references) (LMI)

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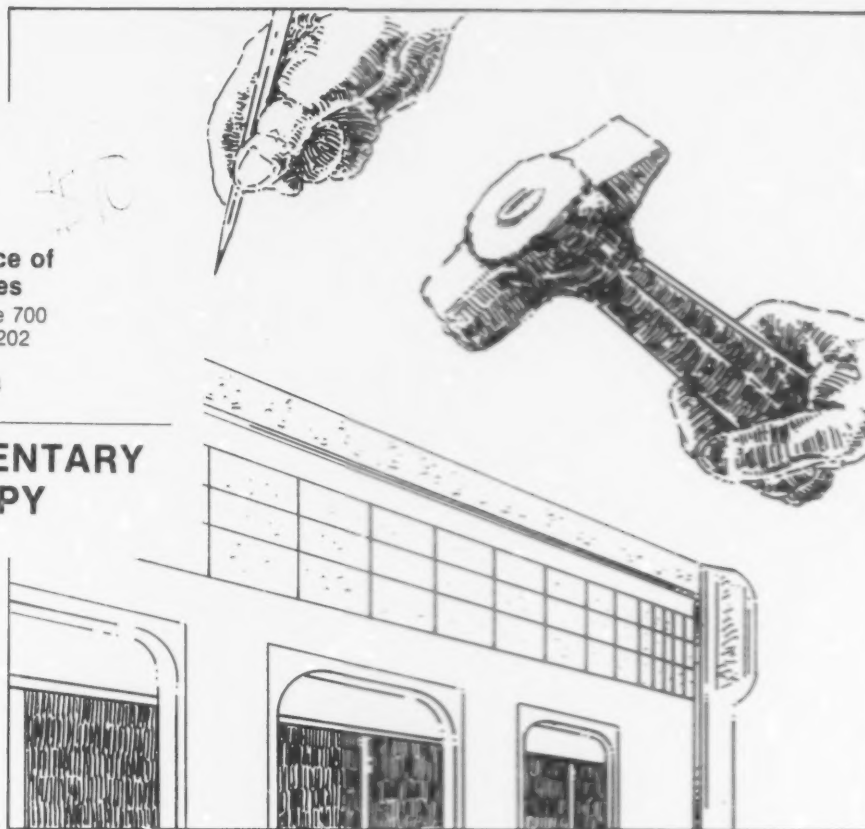
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- ☐ To foster interstate communication and cooperation,
- ☐ To ensure states a strong cohesive voice in the federal system.

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State Policies for School Restructuring

Theodor Rebarber

A joint project of the National Conference of State Legislatures
and the Vanderbilt University Educational Excellence Network

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The widely acclaimed study, *A Nation at Risk*, warned that the deplorable state of American education endangers both our standing in the global economy and our domestic peace and civic culture. It likened it to an act of war by a hostile power. Most states responded with genuine efforts to enhance the quality of public schools. "First-wave" reforms focused on standards such as stricter graduation course requirements, higher teacher salaries, and minimum competency tests for teachers.

At the end of the 1980s, we find little effect from these reforms. Overall, seventeen-year olds are learning no more today than 20 years ago; despite much effort and a good deal of money spent, academic performance for the majority of students remains stagnant. Though some improvements exist among minorities, a substantial gap remains between them and most students, and the number of all pupils achieving at the highest levels has actually decreased slightly.

Current levels are far below what today's students will need in the society of the twenty-first century, too low even for today's computer-driven economy. On international comparisons, American students are consistently outperformed by students in nearly all industrialized nations, especially key economic competitors Germany, Japan, and South Korea.

As we approach what some call the "second wave" of reform since *Nation at Risk*, new proposals that seek to address fundamental inadequacies in the current system are before many state legislatures.

With the help of his education secretary, Lamar Alexander, President Bush recently proposed *America 2000*, a multi-faceted reform plan for the nation. The strategy includes a number of ideas that states and localities considered in recent years—outcome-based national assessments tagged to world-class standards, academies in each state aimed at improving the training of teachers and principals, assistance to implement choice plans, and model restructured schools for each congressional district.

When considering these ideas, most of which are voluntary, legislators need to understand the underlying principles and rationales for each. Discussion of these concepts is contained in these three handbooks. They are a resource for busy elected officials, their aides, and interested citizens trying to make sense of complex—sometimes controversial—policy questions.

Better Education Through Informed Legislation, a two-year project to inform legislators about major education-reform topics, is co-sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures, a nonprofit, bipartisan organization that serves state legislatures; and the Vanderbilt University Educational Excellence Network, an association of more than 1700 reform-minded educators, scholars, policymakers, and journalists.

Better Education Through Informed Legislation emphasizes reform at the state level and reflects a shift in the focus of education policy making begun in the late 1970s. While opportunities for innovation and initiative at the local level remain, state legislators are central to state education policymaking and most observers agree that states will lead policy reform in the 1990s.



INTRODUCTION

"Restructuring" is a term often used but rarely defined by would-be school reformers. It implies fundamental changes in organization, power relationships, and guiding principles. Who leads, who follows; what kinds of changes and why; which schools, which students; who determines the direction of change and who effects it? What are the roles for the state, the district, the school, the classroom? This handbook views restructuring from the perspective of state elected officials. It explores legislative policies that help states achieve their education goals. Before important changes are considered for the fundamentals of a state's education system, these explicit goals must be defined:

- ☐ What should students know?
- ☐ What should students be able to do?
- ☐ What level of performance is "good enough"?
- ☐ How high should the graduation rate be?
- ☐ What other outcomes should be targeted?



WHO NEEDS RESTRUCTURING?

Polls indicate that four in five Americans grade the nation's schools below B on a scale of A to F, and that a similar percentage believe American schools are weak when compared to other western, and Japanese, schools. Despite this poor impression of the nation's schools in general, most Americans are curiously complacent when it comes to the schools in *their* neighborhood or the schools *their* children attend. Forty percent give local schools a grade of A or B. When rating the school their eldest child attends, nearly three-quarters award As or Bs (Elam, Rose and Gallup 1991).

It cannot be that each individual school does its job, but that schools in concert perform poorly. While the public often hears that *American* students perform poorly, there are no reliable comparisons to tell us how students in our state, our district, or our school do, much less about the progress of individuals. The International Assessment of Educational Progress reported in 1992 that a comparison of students in more than a dozen nations placed American students near last, yet most states use commercial tests that find performance in their state and district "above average" (with similarly inflated results for schools and individual students).

A recent study to assess the mathematical abilities of first-graders and fifth-graders in the United States, Japan, and Taiwan shows that even our *best* students do not perform at their full potential. Only 15 Americans placed among the top one-hundred scorers on the first-grade test. By the fifth grade, the gap had widened. Results are similar whether children are compared on complex tasks that require application of knowledge or on routine computational tasks. One study reported that the performance of the top five percent of American students reaches but to the level achieved by the top 50 percent of other nations. (Stevenson 1991)

While most international studies focus on math and science—because they are easiest to compare across cultures—a recent study by the National Endowment for the Humanities on how national exams in other western

nations, and in Japan, assess students in those areas gives little reason for comfort. It noted, for example, that while U.S. students taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) might be asked to choose the correct set of words that approximate the relationship between "yawn" and "boredom," equivalent tests in other countries ask students to answer questions about the history of Cuba or to write essays on such topics as the international significance of the American Revolution or whether it is easy to be "free." A reliable assessment and accountability system that provides relevant information and focuses on what we want our students to know and be able to do is a critical component of any serious reform effort.

Transition in the 80s: From Top-down to Bottom-up

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, *A Nation at Risk*, pronounced the quality of American education so poor that, had it been imposed by a foreign nation, it would be deemed "an act of war." In the years that followed, an unprecedented number of states acted to upgrade the quality of their schools. To a large extent, they followed a similar pattern in their choice of reforms. They added course requisites and options, raised graduation requirements, upgraded facilities, increased teacher pay, hired support staff, and created a host of programs and initiatives aimed at specific educational "problems," such as dropouts.

Although most of the particular mandates and programs enacted were themselves "new" (in those jurisdictions) they followed a long tradition of education policymaking that measured quality in terms of the delivery of various services—the more courses, programs, personnel, facilities and overall spending, the better the "education." The new reforms, for example, bore a striking resemblance in spirit, and in some cases substance, to those advocated by James Conant in his report, *The American High School* (1959), which focused on adding course requirements and expanding electives and other options. When they arrived, at a moment of widespread concern



for American education following the launch of *Sputnik*, Conant's prescriptions were taken as a handy check-list to gauge the quality of high schools. (Ravitch, 1983). The tacit assumption of this approach is that there is a direct causal link between the amount and type of services and programs policymakers mandate and the level of education students achieve.

While the policy tools for which officials instinctively reached had changed little from those of an earlier era, the *job* of schooling was more difficult for two reasons:

- Children faced greater obstacles to learning as a result of a number of broad social changes, among them: The rapid growth of single-parent households, and the spread of illegal drugs and violence.

- The change from a predominantly low-skilled, manufacturing economy to what some call the *Information Age* increased the need for a better educated labor force.

More people needed to be educated to a higher level than ever before and less could be taken for granted outside the schools.

A dropout program begun in New York in 1985 illustrates the difficulties school systems encounter when they try to improve education with traditional top-down methods. The program identifies seventh-grade students at risk of dropping out. It focuses special attention on them, including guidance counselors, mentors for each student, and many other services and supports. An evaluation of the program by the New York City Board of Education after several years showed students enrolled in the program dropping out at rates similar to students not in the program. Although the board recommended trying to reach students even earlier it found the basic problem were the schools themselves. "The kids are making a decision about the schools," noted a board official. The report concluded that without basic changes in the schools, no significant improvement was likely. (Berger 1990)

By the late 1980s, the top-down approach faced competition from policy prescriptions

that differed fundamentally both in what they proposed and in their often tacit assumptions about education and learning. These proposals were termed the "restructuring" movement or the "second wave" of reform since *Nation at Risk*.

In 1986, then-governor of Tennessee, Lamar Alexander, remarked in a National Governors' Association (NGA) report, *Time for Results*, "...the governors are ready for some old-fashioned horse trading. We'll regulate less, if schools and school districts produce better results" (NGA 3, 1986). In 1986, reports by both the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy and the Education Commission of the States (ECS) called for the professionalization of teaching. Many education scholars and school leaders call for similar basic shifts in roles, power relations, and authority from a top-down system to a bottom-up one.

This new thinking has profound implications for education policy. Before discussing them, however, it is helpful to understand four inadequacies of the old concepts that have contributed to development of the new model.

Studies show that implementation of state and district mandates varies widely from site to site and often bears little resemblance to the intentions of reforms. School reforms that show great gains "in the lab" are often diluted or distorted, sometimes beyond recognition, when they are applied in districts, schools, and classrooms. Despite the system's supposed hierarchy, educators at each level have substantial flexibility when implementing reforms.

Because practitioners prefer not to disturb comfortable, timeworn traditions and practices, reform tends to be implemented as either *more* of an extant activity or an *added* program. In response to the new emphasis on teaching children to think for themselves, some schools enacted reforms that set aside time each week for children to engage in "critical thinking," despite the wealth of research—not to mention common sense—that suggests that in order to think, one needs subject matter to think about.



As pressure focused on higher achievement for all children, increased attention was paid to the views of classroom teachers, many of whom were dissatisfied with the control they held over their professional lives. They blamed their inability to respond to demands for improvement on their limited authority in important decisions. How could they be accountable for decisions beyond their control? Both major teacher unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), cited teachers' dissatisfaction and called repeatedly for vesting greater decision-making authority in teachers.

A new generation of researchers provided evidence that questioned the assumed direct link between traditional inputs such as class size, support staff, and facilities, and the output of student knowledge and skill. Factors outside school, such as socioeconomic background, affect student performance even when inputs are equal. Student achievement varies even when schools with similar traditional inputs and similar student populations are compared. Since 1970, per pupil spending increased—in constant dollars—by two thirds while student achievement remained nearly unchanged.

THE RESTRUCTURING MOVEMENT

In response, despite disagreement about specifics, a new generation of reforms proposed ideas that may be grouped loosely as restructuring. Though terminology varies, two related policy themes unite the new restructuring movement:

- ☐ We cannot achieve significantly improved student knowledge and skill with a centralized, bureaucratic system that focuses attention on rules and procedures rather than on results.
- ☐ Each learning environment is a unique combination of personalities, relationships, and physical circumstances that requires frequent adjustment specific to that environment; these are most effective when made by those on-site.

One valuable result of the weakened relationship between traditional inputs and results is a focus on finding what factors *do* affect outputs. Many researchers sought to identify the characteristics of successful schools. Drawing from organizational theory, they found the factors that distinguish such schools generally include:

- ☐ Strong instructional leadership and a common sense of purpose,
- ☐ Expectation that all students can master challenging content,
- ☐ Focus on student outcomes,
- ☐ Broad agreement on overall approach,
- ☐ Substantial autonomy for classroom teachers,
- ☐ A social contract among staff and students that views school as a privilege with attendant obligations,
- ☐ Schools understood as problem-solving rather than rule-observing institutions.

State and Local Restructuring Efforts

A new focus on practitioners at the school site means allowing schools greater decision-making responsibility. School-based management (SBM) implies locating authority at the school level for decisions in four interdependent areas: instruction, budget, personnel, and school organization. Often, schools that attempt to restructure may request waivers from restrictions that impede their efforts.

Most SBM plans to date also involve shared decision-making by a school council comprised of elected representative of a school's *stakeholders*. These include teachers and parents, and may include representatives of the larger community and non-instructional school staff. School principals are usually members of the council as well. Councils are expected to forge consensus on a school-improvement plan and implement it. Each respective constituency—teachers, parents and staff—is expected to ratify the



changes because its interests are represented in the decision-making process.

With the notable exception of Chicago, all shared decisionmaking councils have been dominated numerically by faculty representatives, granting teachers the largest voice in school decisions. Chicago's arrangement, in which teacher representatives form the minority and parents the majority, is based on the premise that teachers' preferences should be considered, but that parents are more likely to focus on results.

Instruction

Instruction may be separated into two areas: curriculum and pedagogy; curriculum is *what* material is taught and pedagogy is *how* material is taught. While decisions about pedagogy are the responsibility of school staff, states play an important role in the area of curriculum. It is the role of state elected officials to lead a statewide dialogue on the knowledge and skills students should attain in public schools. This dialogue may lead to the development of state curriculum frameworks that describe what students should learn as well as research-based models of how it may be taught. A good example of a high-quality curriculum framework is the California model developed by state superintendent Bill Honig. Such frameworks serve as a valuable resource for school practitioners and stimulate thoughtful discussion and innovation. The creation of accountability measures to ensure success is discussed in the companion handbook, *Accountability in Education*. Specifically desired outcomes are not the same as mandated curriculum plans that prescribe what will be learned each day. As long as desired outcomes are achieved, schools should have maximum flexibility to determine how and when students learn particular material.

Budgeting

Without the authority to allocate funds necessary to implement reforms, only limited changes are possible. One SBM school in Dade County, Florida, increased its

discretionary funds from \$90,000 to \$125,000 when it chose not to replace a departing teacher and increased average class size by one student; they wanted to use the extra \$35,000 on new equipment. Even such minor changes require the authority to allocate funds according to school priorities. (Timar, 1989).

The level of budget authority granted schools varies between jurisdictions that undertake restructuring. Too often, the budget authority of SBM schools is limited to a fraction of total school funds. Such restrictions discourage schools from reexamining their *whole* program and raise questions in the minds of school practitioners about the seriousness of reform.

School Organization

SBM schools often experiment with non-traditional methods of organization. This may include class schedules that provide periods of longer uninterrupted instruction, student class reassignments, traditional vacations staggered throughout the school year (so students forget less), a longer school year or longer days, and numerous other possibilities.

In many Asian schools, with student-teacher ratios similar to those in the United States, larger class sizes provide the teachers with free periods during which to discuss and plan lessons. Classroom techniques that engage students in sophisticated thinking and problem solving allow Asian teachers to control larger classes more easily.

In Asian schools teachers spend more time consulting with other teachers and preparing lessons at schools. American teachers tend to plan lessons at home in isolation. Asian teachers' desks are located in a common area where they can easily interact with each other, while in the United States teachers work at desks in their classrooms (Stevenson 1991).

Personnel

At the most basic level, a school consists of the people in it. A coherent reform plan,



developed and implemented successfully, requires staff that is enthusiastic about the new direction and willing to accept new roles and responsibilities.

In a study for the RAND Corporation that examined a variety of different schools, researchers concluded that "the teaching and administrative staff represents the school's capital. Without the capacity to select staff members whose abilities and attitudes match the school's mission, no school can remain a strong organization" (Hill, et al. 1990). In Dade County, one of the few restructuring efforts that attempts to address this important need, the district and teachers union act together to transfer stubbornly uncooperative teachers from SBM schools. Allowing schools to hire applicants with non-traditional degrees or backgrounds is another alternative. Surveys show that most teachers do not feel their education-related course work prepared them to teach. They cite their own experience and their interaction with other teachers as the most important factors in their development (Feistritzer 1990). A study by the State of Texas found no difference in quality between new teachers with degrees in education and those who entered through alternative certification options. A similar California study found equivalent performance by new teachers whether they entered with a traditional degree or through alternative or emergency certification programs. New Jersey's alternative program, which has certified more than 10 percent of all teachers in the country who have entered by alternative options has also proven successful at attracting well-educated minorities (Feistritzer 1990).

The Role of State and Local Education Agencies

Recently, reformers have begun to realize the difficulty of restructuring without attention to the duties and functions of state and local education bureaucracies. If schools are granted authority to make independent decisions, the role of those who had previously enforced compliance with agency policies is shifted to *facilitating* improvement. San Diego is in the forefront of this type of reform. In the summer of 1988,

superintendent Thomas Payzant informed his staff that only he and the deputy superintendent could reject an innovative plan by a school. Payzant envisions an entirely new role for the district . . . "you could have central-office departments and divisions operating as service bureaus, where they provide services on call, or schools purchase them as needed" (Olson 1989).

Similarly, Albert Shanker of the AFT advocates giving schools more per-pupil funds in a lump sum and allowing them to buy services as necessary. In Edmonton, Alberta, schools can choose whether to buy services from the central office or other consulting agencies. San Diego experienced difficulties in its efforts. Although schools are slowly adopting SBM, some still resist. And though the district is seeking new ways to assess performance, the absence of a new accountability system rankles some top administrators and slows the pace of change. "Damn it, they ought to be accountable," lamented one assistant superintendent, "they ought to give us something back, and there ought to be a way of measuring that" (Olson, March 8, 1989).

State policymakers and education officials have a key role to ensure that restructuring succeeds. The first step is to develop consensus about curriculum, drawing on the recommendations of national organizations, the best in other states, even what other nations expect from their students. State accountability—including well-designed assessments—should focus on challenging subject matter outlined in the curriculum framework. Kentucky's new accountability system, modeled on this type of approach, is discussed in the NCSL handbook *Accountability in Education*. State curriculum frameworks should also serve as the basis for systemwide reform in teacher education and teacher certification. Teachers should be certified based on demonstrated ability to teach the subject matter students are expected to learn. Minnesota is among a number of states considering just such an outcomes-based certification system.



The interconnectedness of reform can impede overall progress if all individual aspects are not adequately addressed.

RESTRUCTURING TO DATE: PROBLEMS AND OBSTACLES

Restructuring jurisdictions, whether states or districts, encounter similar difficulties in their efforts to institutionalize higher performance.

Conflicting Mandates and Other Institutions

One common obstacle that confronts SBM schools is opposition from institutions or groups not involved in restructuring, but with the authority to limit change. District-led restructuring in Jefferson County, Kentucky was stymied by state school accreditation restrictions and rigidities in the union contract. (Timar, 1989). Kentucky's new statewide restructuring initiative should limit future problems due to state regulations. In addition to regulations, strict divisions of labor and other demands of staff contracts may put an entire restructuring effort at risk. In Dade County, where SBM schools may waive the union contract *and* district rules, the majority of waivers have been from the contract.

Many jurisdictions are struggling with different versions of a common disease, "projectitis"—which views restructuring as "just another program" and continues to enact mandates that conflict with SBM initiatives. Such actions encourage old ways of thinking and an attitude that, "this too shall pass."

Difficulties On-site

Schools encounter a set of internal problems in their efforts to restructure that are potentially more difficult to address than external opposition. One of these is vagueness in the creation of new bodies of authority, such as shared decisionmaking councils, and their implications for principals. When ultimate authority is not clear, conflicts often occur. In many cases, principals feel they've lost authority but are still responsible for what happens.

Another problem is the assumption that teachers actually want to influence all decisions. Most do not have an interest in participating in decisions they consider "administrative" or related to operations. These include hiring new teachers, evaluating their performance, selecting new principals, and scheduling classes. Most *are* interested in professional discretion about instructional materials and textbooks, student discipline, and the nature of teacher professional development programs. Regardless of the type of decision, however, there are usually some teachers not interested at all, and others who feel strongly that teachers' views should be decisive (Duke and Gansneder 1990). Thus, there is some degree of mismatch in standard SBM between the decisions in which each teacher wishes to participate and those for which he or she has responsibility.

Another difficulty that results from shared decision-making is the formality of the process. Procedures that require unanimity often result in trivial decisions. Even when only a simple majority is necessary, formal processes sometimes emphasize differences. According to a study that evaluated decision making in SBM schools in the United States and Canada, in most schools, although teachers and principals were reasonably well disposed to collaborate at the beginning, the process focused—and in some cases created—latent internal conflicts. By contrast, some of the most ambitious site-based school improvement strategies occurred in schools where most issues were negotiated informally between the principal and a lead teacher (Hill & Bonan 1991).

In part, the difficulty is contentment with the status quo. In Montgomery County, Maryland, after a year of SBM that failed to produce a plan for improvement, one school voted authority back to the district. According to one parent who participated, "I don't think we really ever decided on anything basically because the school is satisfactory" (Goldstein, *Washington Post* 6-10-90). Nationally, while less than 25 percent of business executives think public schools are doing a *good*, or *excellent*, job educating students, over 90 percent of teachers grade their school as an "A" or "B". If educators



think their schools are run well, why engage in difficult rethinking of long-held assumptions or change accepted roles and responsibilities?

School practitioners find all but incremental change difficult, even when there is consensus that change is necessary. Schools must reexamine behaviors and reach consensus on goals and educational philosophy, then establish coherent instructional approaches to implement them.

Because they involve fundamental changes, it may be that restructuring experiments simply need more time and technical assistance. A number of restructuring pioneers, however, are moving away from sole reliance on SBM. Some focus on accountability as the natural corollary to enhanced school authority. Kentucky, in addition to requiring SBM in every school by 1996, is developing a high-quality accountability system that aims to measure progress accurately for each school and provide incentives to encourage success. Rochester, one of the earliest jurisdictions to implement SBM on a larger scale, plans to add a pay-for-performance incentive system to encourage improvement. The design of outcome-based accountability systems compatible with restructuring is discussed in *Accountability in Education*.

Other states and localities are trying to address some of the institutional problems basic to SBM itself. Dade County, Florida, often cited as one of the most successful implementors of system-wide restructuring in the United States, found that students in its SBM schools perform no better than students in its regular schools.

Concluding that adding the ingredients for success to schools invested in traditional thinking may be asking too much, Dade County is at the forefront of a trend toward what may be an effective alternative: charter schools. Though a flexible concept, the essence of charter schools is that public authorities grant charters to organizations or groups of individuals—usually educators or parents—to create new schools according to their own vision of schooling and recruit staff consonant with the school's instructional

philosophy. Over the next several years, all 49 new Dade County schools will be charter schools. Minnesota enacted a statewide charter school initiative in 1991.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Perhaps the earliest system-wide experiment with charter schools began in 1974 in District 4, East Harlem, New York. Although often known to outsiders for allowing students a choice of which school to attend, the district permitted choice only among newly created "alternative schools." District 4's population is 65 percent Hispanic and 34 percent black, and has the highest rate of poverty in New York City. In 1974, students' performance on standardized reading tests required by the New York City school board placed District 4 at the bottom of the 32 New York school districts.

Beginning with just three schools in 1974, leadership encouraged teachers that were dissatisfied with the status quo to do something about it, to start their own schools. Sy Fliegel, former assistant to the superintendent, explains, "In District 4, we created a climate that encouraged teachers to come forward with their dreams, visions or ideas on how to educate youngsters. . . . Our requirement was that a new [principal] had to be successful at what he or she was presently doing and willing to put in extra time, energy, and enthusiasm to make the dream a reality" (Fliegel, Nathan ed., 109 1989).

The system evolved over time. Poorly performing schools were gradually closed and replaced through the new process. By 1982, all junior high schools in the district had been created from the ground up. The district now ranks between 16th and 18th on city reading tests, and the percentage of students reading at or above grade level increased from 16 percent in 1973 to 65 percent today. Other student indicators also show substantial improvement. The greatest obstacles faced by district 4's reformers were the restrictive mandates of the city district and the state, which they have sometimes ignored.



Dade County, profiled in this handbook, began experimenting with restructuring in 1987. More than half its schools are now engaged in SBM. Though it found some improvement in teacher morale, a 1991 self-evaluation by the district found that students attending SBM schools learn no more than students in traditional schools. Though still far from willing to give up its SBM schools, many of which have implemented innovative instructional ideas, Dade County has opted for a more radical approach for new schools--allowing almost any group of educators to apply for a charter to design and run a public school.

Starting in late 1989, Dade declared a request for proposals (RFP) for 49 of what it calls "Saturn Schools." The rationale for the new initiative is to create new schools that embody a coherent approach to learning with staff committed to that approach. Winning teams provide a core leadership for each school that is both familiar with the school's instructional philosophy and committed to making their ideas work.

There are several key questions and issues to address when designing a charter school policy:

☐ *Who can submit a proposal?*

In the Saturn Schools project, the process includes both local and national groups. One of the winners, Education Alternatives of Minneapolis, is a private, for-profit education company. Minnesota's new outcome-based schools experiment, enacted in 1991, charters secular private schools as well as public school teachers.

☐ *Who decides among proposals?*

In Dade County, a joint decisionmaking process involving the district and the teachers union is used. Minnesota's outcome-based schools must be sponsored by the school board in whose jurisdiction they reside, and winning proposals are selected by the state board of education, with some advisory provisions.

☐ *Training and assistance for new schools?*

In Dade County, district staff work with winning teams for a full year before new schools begin operation. School staff is hired at the start of the summer before school begins and trained intensively by the core group throughout the summer.

☐ *Cost.*

A common feature of charter-school proposals to date has been that the new schools operate at a cost close to that of traditional public schools. Such a limitation ensures fairness among schools and students in different schools and provides replicability information.

☐ *How do districts fit in?*

Statewide charter-school initiatives must address the role of districts in schools located within their jurisdiction. Given their regional nature, districts have a natural role to provide training and assistance to the new schools. States must decide whether district approval is necessary for charter schools in a district. Especially if such approval is not required, states may choose to limit district authority to regulate chartered schools.

☐ *Allow choice for students?*

Although not explicit in the concept of charter schools, allowing students to choose among new schools seems to fit well with restructuring principles like learning-environment uniqueness and the need for all participants to feel a sense of "ownership." Given the variety likely among chartered schools, not allowing choice might create problems where parents who are uncomfortable with a school's direction are afraid their kids will be "experiments." This has proven significant even for traditional SBM schools that implement major changes. While Dade County does not include a choice provision for its Saturn Schools, Minnesota outcome-based schools are integrated into its statewide open-enrollment program. Permitting choice ensures that attendance at distinctive charter schools is a burden for no one and a privilege for all.



- ❑ *Creating a long-term implementation process to avoid projectitis.*

The easiest place to start implementation is with new schools that must hire new staff and attract new students. Politically more difficult--although critical for systemic improvement--is transforming older schools with existing staff and students. Neither Dade County nor Minnesota has dealt with this issue at this stage of their programs.

A charter schools proposal that came close to passing in the North Carolina General Assembly in 1991 does address this issue and is worth examining. Project Genesis calls for transforming traditional schools within a district if, after a number of years, student outcomes at charter schools are demonstrably superior. Schools performing poorly would undergo transformation first. As for new schools, winning teams hire staff that fit their needs and are committed to the school's mission. Existing school staff have first consideration but are not guaranteed employment at the new school.

RESTRUCTURING AND OTHER REFORMS

Restructuring--changing established institutional roles and responsibilities to optimize educational results--plays an important reform role. The underlying principle of today's restructuring movement is the realization that schools as they are currently constituted are failing to unleash the energies and talents of our educators and our students. New modes of organization must focus on creating institutions that consistently, in their normal mode of operation, tap this well spring of unused potential. But organizational restructuring is only one part of an overall reform package. A sound accountability system--clear and measurable outcome goals, mechanisms that assess progress at important levels in the system, and incentives for success coupled with consequences for failure--is another key component.

Policies that allow students' outside experiences to play a positive role in reinforcing their education are as critical. It is

often cited that by the time children reach 18 years of age they have spent less than 10 percent of their time in a formal school environment. Proposals to increase time spent in school promise to change that figure by only a few percentage points. Researchers have shown that parental involvement that reinforces and complements children's formal education can have a substantial benefit on children's achievement. Helping parents--the most important influence on children outside school--to help their children is the focus of the first handbook in this series, *Parent Enabling Policies for States*.

In the end, policymakers cannot improve education on their own. They can only create the most hospitable policy environment for those on education's front lines--teachers, parents, and students. As elected officials, legislators have a special responsibility that goes beyond policymaking. They must be leaders who inspire high standards and excellence in education.

DADE COUNTY

Dade County is recognized by reformers and academics nationwide as one of the early pioneers in school restructuring. Dade County was one of the first jurisdictions to experiment with SBM on a substantial scale. Restructuring began in July, 1986 when the Dade County School Board approved the pilot SBM program.

The Dade County reform effort has been characterized since its inception by close ties between the district and the local teachers union, United Teachers of Dade (UTD), on the issue of school reform. A three-year contract, approved in 1986, combined provisions that support school-based reform with a 28 percent increase in teachers' pay over three years; some teachers salaries reach \$64,000 per year.

Of the 53 schools that applied for the pilot program in 1986-1987, 32 were chosen by a committee comprised of representatives from the district office and the teachers' union. A school's faculty must approve application for SBM status by a two-thirds margin. In the



school's faculty must approve application for SBM status by a two-thirds margin. In the pilot, 20 participants were neighborhood schools and 12 were magnets.

The first year (1986-1987) focused on staff training and planning; full implementation began in 1987. The pilot called for a three-year period of full implementation. The first two years, 1987-1988 and 1988-1989 were viewed as "formative"—too early for important results. The third year, 1989-1990, would yield a "summative" evaluation of the programs effect on student outcomes. Additional funds for the reform effort—beyond salary raises—have been meager. In 1987, the district received \$150,000 from the State of Florida as part of a program to encourage reform. New SBM schools originally received \$6,000 in additional funds for start-up costs. This sum was later reduced to \$3,000. At the request of participating schools, however, some limited staff development programs were established by the district.

After the first pilot year, additional schools could elect to participate with the same two-thirds vote of faculty. At this writing, a majority of Dade County schools are in the SBM program. The district, to its credit, continued to monitor progress for the first 32 schools separately. This provides a stable sample of schools whose efforts can be tracked over time.

Structure and Decisionmaking

At the district level, schools participating in SBM report to a separate office, especially created to serve them. Answering directly to the superintendent, this Office of School-Based Management proved not only a source of assistance but an ally through which SBM schools could circumvent the traditional bureaucratic chain of command. This seems to have played an important role in helping Dade County SBM schools achieve a high level of autonomy.

Participating schools must design their own shared decisionmaking process, with restrictions: the principal must be included, as well as the UTD representative; at least half

those involved must be elected. Although there has been considerable variation in the decision-making process among schools, the most common feature has been a school council where most decisions are made; often committees in particular areas have also been created. The number of participants varies greatly, from just a handful of individuals to an unwieldy 34 in one case.

School-level authority

Because of the district- and union-led nature of reform in Dade County, one might expect change there to be largely top-down. In fact, the strong support and cooperation of these different elements resulted in unusual freedom for individual schools. SBM schools received wide latitude over as much as 80 to 90 percent of their budgets—including most categorical funding—and also exercise authority over personnel, curriculum, and scheduling. They choose new staff, and over time, have gained a primary role in new principal selection. They alter staff roles and add salary enhancements. Although they don't have the last word on dismissal, they may initiate such actions or, more often, arrange transfers out of the school.

A key factor of increased authority is the waiver process established at the outset of reform. In other restructuring jurisdictions waivers often go unused, but they are a key reform instrument in Dade County. Hundreds of waivers have been granted. While waivers in other jurisdictions are often limited to state or district regulations, Dade County schools may obtain waivers from collective bargaining provisions as well. Chicago's restructuring initiative also allows waivers from collective bargaining agreements. In Dade County, the largest number of waiver requests, by a substantial margin, have been from union rules.

SBM results to date

Despite the radical-sounding nature of some of the changes attempted by SBM schools, results to date are disappointing. Dade County's focus on restructuring, to the exclusion of accountability and other aspects of reform, hampered its efforts. While overall



teacher morale seems improved somewhat, a three-year outcomes evaluation found no difference in achievement for children in SBM schools when compared to the district as a whole. Yearly dropout rates at the four SBM high schools improved slightly, from 7 percent to 5.7 percent, while the rate for the district remained unchanged at approximately 8 percent. (Dade County Public Schools, 1991). A study by Miami-Dade Community College found that 60 percent of its freshmen from Dade County public schools required remedial work, including four who graduated in the top 20 percent of their high school class. (Grant 1990)

Many schools seemed to run into inertia, finding it difficult to conceive and implement coherent, large-scale changes; this may be due, in part, to the frustrating nature of shared decisionmaking itself. A number of high-quality magnet schools have several times voted against SBM. One observer noted, "... they fear the (internal) bureaucracy that goes ... with Dade's current version of SBM would drain too much of teachers' energies" (Grant 1990). In some SBM schools, long hours and endless meetings brought teachers to the point of burnout and slowed or limited the reform process.

While some principals have adapted well to the shared decision-making model used in Dade County, others feel their authority decreased without concomitant reductions of responsibility. One unhappy principal noted, "... the bottom line is that this is shared decisionmaking, not [shared] responsibility."

Next Steps

Two new education reforms hold promise for addressing some of the difficulties Dade County has faced.

In 1991, the Florida Legislature enacted a new state reform plan, *Blueprint 2000*, which focuses on decentralized authority down to the school and district levels and accountability for results. *Blueprint 2000* establishes a process by which local school boards may request waivers from many state

laws and regulations. Among the statutes which may be waived are compensatory education, the allocation of instructional materials, the number of class periods in a day, and numerous others.

By the fall of 1992, the state plans to create performance standards to measure school and district progress toward new statewide outcome goals. These include raising student achievement to the highest national and international levels and ensuring adequate preparation for work or postsecondary education. A new system of school "report cards" is to be established for the state, districts, and individual schools.

Rewards are planned for schools that make exceptional progress and stringent intervention is planned for schools that fail to show sufficient improvement for three consecutive years.

The Saturn Schools Program

While the state's *Blueprint 2000* addresses accountability and seems to ensure state flexibility, a new initiative by the district itself may solve a number of organizational difficulties encountered by its restructuring program. The Saturn Project, like the original SBM initiative, is the result of collaboration between the district and UTDC. Dade County considers its new initiative the "ultimate SBM/SDM model (DCPS, "Professionalization of Teaching Task Force Overview," March 1990). It may be considered a version of the chartered schools concept, as discussed earlier. The district decided to publish RFPs for the 49 new schools it planned to add between 1989 and the mid-1990s. School contracts are awarded to winners for a set number of years, after which they may be reviewed.

While proposals for the first school were "piloted" locally, competition subsequently was open to anyone wishing to apply. Conferences were held in different parts of the country to encourage prospective applicants. The Dade County initiative is notable for its openness; any serious application is considered, from any applicant.



One winning application came from a private, for-profit firm, Education Alternatives of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Former Dade County associate superintendent, Frank Petruzielo, characterizes the process as "... moving away from the interest group model that has influenced public policy in education."

Applications must address fundamental aspects of how the new school will operate on a budget no larger than that of existing schools and must include information about instructional philosophy, building structure needs, curriculum, staff selection and organization, student assignment, parent and community involvement, model of shared decisionmaking, and required waivers. They must also describe student achievement goals and internal accountability procedures. Winners consist of a planning team—often a principal and lead teacher—which has one year to complete the school plan and hire and train staff accordingly.

Winning proposals vary in their approach but share a unity of courage and coherence of vision. One emphasizes bilingual programs and multi-cultural education; another encourages teachers to do their own research and provides them with individual work areas. The Tessaract School, run by Education Alternatives, is one of the most radical: it reduces the student-teacher ratio to one to 12, primarily by not hiring counselors or other support staff; develops individual education programs for every child; has an incentive pay system for teachers; and establishes a contract of specific responsibilities with parents. The bulk of its students are disadvantaged and minority.

Though the district does not operate a formal choice program, it is considering how to address an unexpected "problem"—the interest by a significant number of middle-class parents to have their children attend the new Saturn schools, especially the Tessaract school.

CHICAGO

On December 2, 1988 the Illinois General Assembly passed the Chicago School Reform

Act in response to a wave of popular discontent with that city's schools. A number of studies conducted by local reform groups for several years highlighted the need for fundamental change. A 1985 study by one such group found that only a third of Chicago students performed at the national norm on a commercial test used by the district. Another study by a different organization found that over 40 percent of Chicago high school freshmen did not complete work for their diploma; the rate was as high as two-thirds at some schools.

Little trust existed between reform advocates and district leadership. This poor relationship had its roots in the school fiscal crisis of 1979-1980, when the burden of cutbacks fell disproportionately on teachers rather than administrators. Lack of what reformers considered serious action by the district through the early and mid-1980s further solidified reform groups' negative perceptions.

This distrust strongly influenced the 1988 reform package that won in the state legislature. As much power as politically feasible was brought to the school level, and much of that power was placed in the hands of "outsiders"—parents.

School-level Changes

Formal authority at individual schools was shifted to 540 new local school councils (LSCs), one for each school. LSCs are composed of 10 elected members plus the (non-voting) principal. Six LSC members must be parents, two are teachers and two are from the local community.

Schools were given new authority in all areas of curriculum, budgeting, and personnel. The extent of that authority in many areas is vague, however, and is a frequent source of friction between schools and the district office. The reform act was explicit on several points—councils have full authority to select a new principal to serve a four-year contract that could be renewed only by the LSC; each school's LSC and principal are required to adopt a school improvement plan (SIP) and budget. Although they cannot dismiss



employees, principals may select whoever fills a new or empty position on instructional staff solely on the basis of merit, regardless of seniority or other considerations. LSCs receive liability insurance, paid for by the district, for actions undertaken in the normal course of their duties.

The 1991 law that redesigned the LSC election process also increased the authority of principals over non-instructional staff—a point of previous conflict for several LSCs—although they still do not have complete authority in this domain.

A waiver process was created for individual schools to seek exemption from district regulations and collective bargaining provisions. By August 1991, 60 waiver applications had been granted by the union; none were rejected on substantive grounds. Disagreements with district regulations have not been channeled into waiver requests. Rather, it seems LSCs are taking as much authority as they feel they need and struggling with the district when opposed.

Schools also gained limited additional discretionary spending. Beginning at approximately \$90,000 in the first year, additional funds are projected to grow to as much as \$450,000 by the fifth year of implementation. The new funds were made available primarily as a result of two changes mandated by the reform act. The Chicago public school district was required to cut hundreds of central office employees; this provided a substantial portion of the first year's discretionary funds. Federal Chapter 1 funds, previously diverted to district administration, were redirected to schools; this provided some funds for the first year and at present is the only source for future funds.

Professional Development

The reform act stated that each school was to create a professional personnel advisory committee (PPAC) composed of certified classroom teachers to advise principals on school improvement plans and implementation. Unfortunately, most schools

have not shown much interest and few PPACs are active.

District and Sub-district Reforms

The reform act created an entirely new structure of district management whose authority was to flow primarily from the bottom up. New councils at the regional level consist of parent or community representatives from LSCs located in the sub-district. They choose whether to retain or replace the previous sub-district superintendent. Regional superintendents are facilitators of reform in their area and help coordinate improvement efforts where appropriate. With the approval of their council, they also have authority to place schools that fail to improve on "probation." So far, sub-district councils and superintendents have played a minimal role and no schools have been placed on probation.

The new board of education (an interim board was necessary for a short period) is appointed through a complex process that includes a commission of representatives of the sub-district councils, which nominates slates of candidates, and the mayor, who chooses the district board from the slates. If a school placed on probation by a sub-district council doesn't improve after one year, the district board of education may order new LSC elections, replace the principal, or close the school.

It is not clear how much authority the new district superintendent was intended to wield on a day-to-day basis. The district still negotiates contracts for all district employees. The superintendent has encountered criticism on several occasions for district-wide actions he has enforced.

Progress to Date

It is too early to judge progress in terms of student outcomes. Implementation of the formal structures has proceeded reasonably well. Some early critics doubted whether the type of parent involvement on LSCs envisioned by the architects of the reform law



was realistic, especially for schools with predominantly disadvantaged student bodies. In elections for LSCs, over 300,000 voters elected 5,400 council members from 17,000 candidates.

The success of school-level reform by councils and principals is not as clear. Schools have discharged their formal duties to adopt school improvement plans and budgets. There has been a significant degree of friction between LSCs and the superintendent. Many councils' view the district's few efforts in the area of training and technical assistance as inadequate.

On several occasions where the superintendent sought to implement district-wide policies, strong disagreements developed with councils that disagreed and felt such actions were no longer within the superintendent's purview. In one case, the district sought to save funds by requiring that high school teaching aides be paid out of LSCs' discretionary funds. In another, the superintendent responded to several well-publicized crimes in schools by requiring schools to hire police officers to guard schools, again using LSC discretionary funds. Several schools had previously arranged similar protection free of charge, but the superintendent's action required that they begin paying for such services.

Apart from disagreements with the central office, it is not clear how imaginative or successful LSC reform initiatives have been. Some observers note a lack of vision on the part of many school-level efforts so far (Finn and Clements 1992). Few LSC members have had much experience with management before; this is especially true of many parents.

Lack of accountability structures may be a significant flaw. Because commercially published achievement tests used by the district are not viewed as trustworthy measures of success, few measurable standards exist for Chicago schools.

MINNESOTA

By 1996, the Minnesota State Board of Education plans to require that all Minnesota

students demonstrate high-level competence in several subject areas and skills to receive a high school diploma. Full implementation of the new graduation system is planned by the fall of 1996 or sooner. Minnesota views it as the cornerstone of public education reform in that state.

The new board rule is the result of a year-long process that included over 200 teachers, administrators, and other concerned educators. The board of education hopes to modify and improve the plan through 23 town meetings at which community members may offer input.

In action that complements the state board's move to an outcomes-based education system, the Minnesota Legislature passed an education bill, effective July 1, 1991, that includes provisions to experiment with outcome-based schools. Districts may apply to start such schools, which are intended to promote teacher creativity to help students achieve the new standards and to implement accountability mechanisms that focus on results. Outcome-based schools are the product of teacher innovation, allowing teachers to retain final authority over almost all aspects of their operation. Under the new system the state monitors results, student and school performance are assessed by state-approved procedures and standards. Although standards for measuring student achievement are not yet determined, Minnesota plans to develop testing mechanisms that combine traditional standardized testing with oral and other types of performance-based assessment.

Selection Process for Outcome-based School Proposals

A school board may sponsor one or more licensed teachers to operate an outcome-based school in its jurisdiction; although in certain circumstances it may be run as a for-profit cooperative, in most cases schools will be nonprofit. According to the reform law, each board may sponsor up to two of these schools. A total of eight outcome-based schools are permitted at present.



The school board must file an affidavit with the state board that outlines its proposal to approve outcome-based schools. The state board then has 30 days to approve or reject the sponsor's terms and conditions.

In cases where predominantly white teachers wish to form a school where the majority of students will be non-white, the state board must appoint a 10-member advisory committee to review proposals. This committee is to be composed of at least two members from these ethnic groups: African-American, American-Indian, Asian-Pacific American, and Hispanic. At least one member from each ethnic group must be a parent of a school-age child and at least half must have a family income which makes them eligible for "free or reduced school lunches."

Once the outcome-based school is approved, teachers are required to elect the school's board of directors. All staff members and parents are allowed to participate, although licensed teachers must make up the majority on the board. A written contract of authorization is to be signed by the local school district and the new board of directors.

The contract, which may not exceed three years, must include a description of the proposed school. It outlines specific expectations for student performance as well as school policies and procedures for admission, management, and administration. In addition, an outcome-based school must assume liability. The law does not specify whether coverage will be paid by the district or by the individual school.

Creating the School

A sponsor may provide start-up costs if help is essential for a school to "raise working capital." State aid and local funds follow a student to either a regular public school or an outcome-based school, according to his or her choice.

Outcome-based schools may rent space from their districts or other public or private, non-profit, non-sectarian organizations.

The school board of directors has authority to hire and fire teachers and other staff and to procure any services necessary to run the school effectively. The board is responsible for all budgeting, curriculum, and operating procedures.

As a "public employer," an outcome-based school is regarded as a separate legal entity from the district, and thus not bound by outside collective bargaining agreements. A school's board of directors is responsible to negotiate its own agreements with employees as required by law.

Exemptions and Requirements

Outcome-based schools are exempt from all rules and regulations applied to a school board or district except health, safety, and accounting requirements. The schools must be nonsectarian in all operations and hold no affiliation with any religious institution. No tuition may be charged.

School Operations

Student admission requirements for outcome-based schools are somewhat ambiguous. According to the reform law, the schools may not limit admission on the basis of a student's intellectual ability or achievement. Further, if space allows, "the school shall enroll an eligible pupil who submits a timely application."

However, schools can limit admission to certain age groups and "grade levels," as well as to those who have a "specific affinity for the school's teaching methods." (Under certain restrictions relating to ethnic and racial diversity, admission can also be limited to a specific geographic area.)

Transportation for students attending outcome-based schools will be provided by the district in which the school is located.

Causes for Non-renewal or Termination of an Outcome-based School

The State Board of Education or the sponsor may either renew or terminate a contract at the end of its term. Grounds for termination



include failure to meet contract requirements for student performance, financial improprieties, committing a violation of law, or any other reasonable cause which can be shown.

The sponsor or state board must notify a school's board of directors at least 60 days before contract termination. This written notification must outline in detail the grounds for the action. Within 14 days of notification, the board of directors can request an informal hearing before the local or state board. The sponsor or state board must make a final decision by the last day of the school year.

KENTUCKY

In 1990, the Kentucky General Assembly passed what many observers regard as the most radical statewide restructuring initiative to date. While many states focus on isolated pieces of the reform puzzle, Kentucky stands out for the comprehensiveness of its changes. This section focuses on the aspects of the Kentucky reform act that affect school governance and organization and staff professionalism.

Kentucky also enacted important changes to its accountability approach as it moved toward a more coherent, outcome-based system. The state's Council on School Performance Standards was given the task of framing the reform act's six broad outcome goals in *measurable terms*. By July 1993, the state will establish a curriculum framework based on the work of the council. This broad instructional framework will identify classroom teaching and assessment strategies, instructional materials, ideas on how to incorporate community resources, a directory of model teaching sites, and alternative ways to use school time.

Detailed discussion of the goal-and standard-setting process, accountability mechanisms, and overall underlying principles of the Kentucky reforms may be found in the companion NCSL handbook *Accountability in Education*.

Other major changes were enacted. Strict anti-nepotism provisions are to be enforced at

the local level. The state board of education is directed to establish health standards for all children and a network of centers throughout the state to coordinate social services.

Technology is to be a high priority with the creation of a state Council for Education Technology. The new council has prepared a five-year plan that includes adding a telephone to every classroom.

School-based Management

The act's SBM provisions are intended to bring substantial authority to the school level. By the 1991-1992 school year, all districts must have at least one school operating as an SBM school. Schools may elect to participate any time after January 1991 by a two-thirds vote of their faculty. By 1996, however, *all* Kentucky schools are required to switch to SBM. The only exceptions will be schools that vote against SBM by a two-thirds margin *and* meet or exceed the state's performance standards.

Shared Decisionmaking

The reform act specifies that SBM schools be led by six-member councils consisting of the principal or head teacher (chair), three elected teachers, and two parents chosen by the largest parent organization operating at that school. The rigidity of this formula caused some criticism soon after it was announced, particularly by schools and districts already experimenting with somewhat different versions of shared decisionmaking. An exception was therefore added — schools may employ alternative decisionmaking models if they secure the approval of their local education board, the state commissioner and the state board of education. It remains to be seen how much flexibility this procedure allows in practice.

New School-level Authority

Schools engaged in SBM should gain broad authority in instruction, budgeting, personnel, and school organization. Schools will have control over staff hiring, including selection of principals; the roles and responsibilities of the principal, teachers, counselors, students, and parents; assignment



other school programs; scheduling of school day and week; use of school space; extracurricular programs; and, within state law and district policies, student discipline. Local school boards are required to allocate proportionate funds for instructional materials and other support services determined by a local school council.

Ambiguity remains over how much discretion this translates into in practice, especially if a district is opposed to a council's actions. If districts are resistant, and if they obstruct even a few school councils, it may lead many to believe that nothing has changed.

Local school boards may grant additional authority to school councils if they wish. They are required, however, to provide school councils with liability insurance for events that result from actions taken in the normal course of their duties.

Waivers From State Rules

At a school council's request, a local school superintendent may obtain a waiver from state regulations governing any matter except health, safety, or civil rights. Also excepted are regulations required by federal law. Until the 1994-1995 school year—when a new outcome-based accountability system is planned—any request by a school that meets the state's previous standards may be granted. Beginning in 1994-1995, only schools meeting the state's new performance threshold will automatically be granted waivers. All other waiver requests will be granted on a case-by-case basis. Unfortunately, no official waiver process has been created for work rules and other restrictions in union contracts.

State and District-level Changes

The reform act creates a new appointed state board of education. Members must be nominated by the governor and confirmed by the legislature. The previous state superintendent—whose position is mandated by the state constitution—is stripped of all powers until the constitution may be amended.

A new state commissioner of education is created and assigned the role of chief state school officer. The first such commissioner was selected by a six-member committee created by the governor and legislative leaders. Later commissioners are to be chosen by the new state board and will serve at the board's pleasure.

State Department of Education

The state department of education is to be radically restructured by the new commissioner in light of the new role assigned it by the reform act. It is to refocus its activities toward accountability and technical assistance to schools. The reform act mandates the creation of regional service centers to help local school practitioners by 1992.

The state department of education is directed to provide professional development programs in several areas, including the reform act itself, SBM, non-graded primary programs, research-based instructional programs, instructional use of technology, and the motivation of diverse students.

The act abolished all previous positions at the department as of December 1990. The new commissioner, was allowed to rehire any previous employees that he felt fit the needs of the new department.

Time In School

Several changes are made or proposed in the duration and structure of students' time in school. In primary school, the reform act ends grade distinctions prior to grade four. What was previously kindergarten through grade three becomes a time when children may proceed at their own pace to master the knowledge and skills necessary for the fourth grade. In order to enter the fourth grade, students will be asked to demonstrate their competence on new state assessment measures. The commissioner of education is also required to make a recommendation to the 1992 session of the legislature on whether to extend the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18 for students who have not earned a diploma. By the 1994-1995 school



earned a diploma. By the 1994-1995 school year, the state board of education must review the state graduation requirements in light of the new student outcomes expectations. This is likely to result in a change in the high school diploma requirements from Carnegie units to subject mastery.

The effect of these changes, both in the early and later years, is to shift the focus from often arbitrary distinctions (that is, grade, course credits, years in school) and place it squarely on the mastery of specified skills and knowledge. Those who need more time can have it without the onus of "failing" a grade and, to some degree, those who need less time may use less. The bottom line moves from being time based to being outcome based.

Preschool Education

The reform act creates an Early Childhood Education Advisory Council appointed by the governor to advise the state commissioner of education on implementation of preschool programs. The act further mandates that every school district must offer half-day preschool programs for at-risk four-year olds. Other youngsters may be admitted if space permits.

Employee Professionalism

Starting in July 1990, the reform act placed teacher certification under the control of a new education professional standards board. A majority of the members of the new board must be classroom teachers. The new board is directed to create new certification procedures for those entering through traditional routes as well as a new alternative certification process.

Teacher training programs are to place a greater emphasis on subject matter competence rather than teaching just technique. As noted above, most teachers give little credit to their formal training, finding that classroom experience was far more valuable. To bring into the classroom talented individuals with useful expertise in an area, the new board is directed to develop standards for an alternative certification process. These standards will guide individual district programs, which are to be regulated by the board.



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